SHORT SESSION OF CONGRESS

(Washington Letter.)

The session of Congress which met December 2d is invested with historic interest, because it was just 100 years ago that Congress first met in the capital city and in the capitol building. November 17 was the centennial day. "It was the day," says a writer, "when the young nation left its temporary abiding place in Philadelphia and came to its permanent home—and to a new building reared for its legislative bodies. Congress had adjourned in Philadelphia on May 14, 1800, to meet in this city on November 17, and immediately after the adjournment President Adams gave directions 'for the removal of the public offices, records, and property to Washington.'"

A Short Session.

The closing session of the Fifty-sixth Congress will last a scant period of three months, out of which must be taken the Christmas and New Year's holidays—usually a fortnight in length. In that short time whatever is to be done by Congress before December of next year must be done, for President McKinley, it is said, has no intention of calling an extra session of the next Congress. He hopes to get (after the extra session of the Senate, which will be held in March to dispose of nominations), the vacation he has not had since the year before his first nomination. He is planning to visit the Pacific coast with the special object of attending the launching of the battleship Ohio at San Francisco.

But, notwithstanding the short time at the disposal of Congress, some legislation of the utmost importance will be considered. The program has not been fully arranged, but it will include matters which will be debated long and vigorously, and the opening of the flood gates of oratory may defeat measures for want of time to pass them.

The Spooner Bill.

The Spooner bill for the government of the Philippines will be pressed for passage. It gives congressional sanction to the government of the islands by the president, and simply repeats, in almost literal language, the authority vested by congress in President Jefferson at the time of the Louisiana purchase. It is understood that congress may also take up the congressional apportionment bill, and great interest attaches to that measure because not only will it necessitate the recasting of congressional districts in many of the states, but it involves a possibility of cutting down the representation of the south on account of the alleged disfranchisement of illiterate negroes. For this reason the country, and the south particularly, is watching developments. It is probable, however, the nothing will be done along this line. The president and the leaders in congress are understood to be opposed to any action. The basis of representation will no doubt be raised to 200,000, giving a membership of about 380, as compared with 357 at present.

Ship Subsidy Bill.

The ship subsidy bill, which carries an appropriation for ten years for American ships engaged in the foreign trade, will come up and will be fought fiercely. Its fate is uncertain. The house will probably pass it, but the senate may take adverse action. Enemies of the bill estimate that it will cost about $300,000,000 in ten years for subsidies, but its friends contend that the cost will be comparatively slight, the results considered.

It is pretty well understood that there will be some reduction in war taxes, and the opinion prevails that this reduction will amount to about $30,000,000.

The Army Bill.

An important measure is the army reorganization bill.

Senator Hawley of Connecticut, chairman of the military committee, talking about army legislation, said: "Just what the details of the bill will be when agreed upon in the committee and reported to the senate is a matter of speculation. In the near future, of course, there may be cause for reduction, but 100,000 men at least ought to be agreed upon at this time. Again, I think a measure might be passed empowering the president to use his discretion to a great extent in determining the exact strength of the army, not of course to exceed the maximum fixed by congress."

The Isthmian Canal.

The other bill which ranks as paramount over every other measure before the present congress or any other congress for many a session is the Nicaragua canal bill. The main facts concerning the status of the canal question in congress are summarized as follows:

I. The Hay-Pauncefote treaty of Feb. 5, 1900, is unratified. The original convention required that the ratifications should be exchanged within six months; that is to say, prior to Aug. 5, 1900. By a subsequent agreement between Secretary Hay and Lord Pauncefote this period was extended, and the negotiations are accordingly alive. The ratification of the treaty as it now stands would admit Great Britain and other European powers to joint political control of this American waterway. They would become guarantors of the neutrality of the canal in time of war as in times of peace; and theirs would be the right and the duty to enforce neutrality even against ourselves in any war in which this country was engaged. The Hay-Pauncefote treaty allows us to construct this canal, to pay for it and to operate it as a trustee for the world's commerce; it prohibits the fortification of the canal by us.

The Hepburn Bill.

II. The Hepburn canal bill passed the house of representatives on May 2, 1900. It had not passed the senate when congress adjourned. The bill is now in the senate, and is the all-absorbing topic of the week in Washington.

The canal proposed by this measure is an American canal, in fact as well as in name. Without reference to the Hay-Pauncefote negotiations and independently of the provisions or restrictions of the proposed treaty, the Hepburn bill authorizes the president to acquire from Costa Rica and Nicaragua the necessary territory, and to pay for the same; empowers the secretary of war to proceed to construct the canal; it empowers him likewise to fortify it; and it limits the total cost to $140,000,000, directly appropriating $10,000,000 for beginning the work. The idea of neutrality and of supervision to be exercised by other governments over our control of the canal does not enter.

AT THE TAP OF THE GAVEL.
(Scene at the opening of the short session of Congress.)

Aztec Relics in Mexico.

A number of Aztec relics were discovered recently in the city of Mexico during the excavation for sewer mains in the Calle de las Escalerillas. This street and the site of the cathedral formed part of the site of the great temple of Huitzilopochtli, the Aztec god of war. Among the figures just found were representations of Ehecatl, the god of air. One of these is painted red, yellow and black, and in spite of the dampness of the ground where it has lain for centuries, the colors are bright and fresh in appearance. The images are adorned with disks of polished gold which are engraved in a remarkable manner. A number of gold ornaments for the person, beads, amulets, axes, knives, lances, and pieces of earthenware also were found. Mr. Bates, inspector-general of monuments, says that in the Calle de las Escalerillas, two of the 78 chapels which, as Sahagun relates, surrounded the main temple, have already been discovered. The first chapel discovered, says Mr. Bates, was that of Teoyanique, goddess of death, with some fine pieces of pottery. The second chapel discovered is that of Ehecatl, the god of air, also accompanied by the attributes known to have been placed about his image by the Aztec priests.

Autocracy in Chicago.

Captain Colleran, head of the Chicago detective bureau, went to a music hall the other night and was shocked by one of the songs. Accordingly he ordered the objectionable lines cut out of the performance. When Chief Kipley, who prides himself on his reputation as a dramatic critic, heard what his subordinate had done he was angry, feeling that his prerogatives had been infringed on. In order that he might maintain his professional dignity he went to the music hall himself and cut some more lines out of the same song. Now that these two eminent stage censors have begun to get active it is hoped that they will continue and embark their work, for which a great opportunity and a crying need exists, says the Tribune. There are in the city a considerable number of so-called music halls and concert saloons in which not only the songs but other features of the performances are calculated to offend and shock decent people. The only way to reform most of these places would be to revoke their liquor licenses and close them up entirely. The proprietors of some of these resorts are men who boast their political influence and "pull." They, it is to be presumed, will be left to elevate the stage in their own way.

Annual Attack on Santa Claus.

Every year at about this season a number of well meaning but probably dyspeptic gentlemen make a furious and mirth-provoking attack on Santa Claus. According to their own statements the poor old saint is nothing but an idle myth and while there are so many real live flesh and blood dragons stalking around through the land it seems a pity that so much energy and argumentative zeal should be wasted on him. Don Quixote charged a windmill, but that was because there was no other opponent visible on the horizon. The man who couches a lance at Kriss Kringle must overlook a hundred great enemies to the moral and physical welfare of all mankind in order to take from childhood a happy and certainly an innocent illusion. But, say the amusing members of the Anti-Santa Claus association, there is no such a person as Kriss Kringle. He never existed. Therefore, to tell a child about Santa Claus and his reindeer is to tell him a lie and is deeply reprehensible. It is to be wondered whether such painfully and pitifully literal people ever watched a couple of healthy children at their play.

England's Tax on Millionaires.

Richard Croker has made the unpleasant discovery that if he wishes to live in England he must pay the English income tax. The British authorities estimate his income at $100,000, and they have accordingly levied upon him for $5,000 a year as the price of residence in that country. At the same time a similar case of still more importance has just been decided in the Lord Chief Justice's court, by virtue of which the estate of another ex-American, William L. Winans, is compelled to pay death duties of $1,000,000, or nearly 10 per cent of the entire estate. At this rate the British people can afford to give a cordial welcome to American millionaires who prefer to live on British soil, since the strangers are made to pay roundly during life by means of an income tax and are assessed still more heavily at death. A neat sum like that from the Winans estate should be especially welcome now, when the British rate payer must go down into his pockets to defray the $500,000,000 which the Boer war cost.

Norman the Best Dresser.

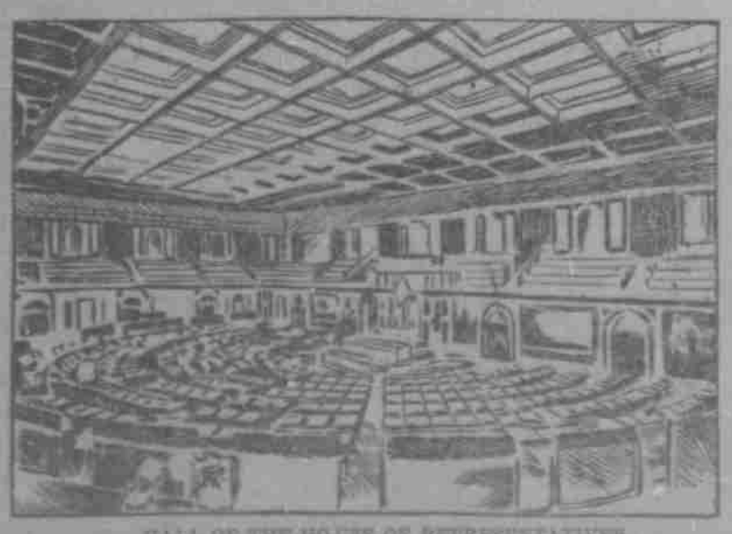
"Best dressed man in Washington" is the title given by national capital society to Herman C. Norman, third secretary of the British legation. Mr. Norman, who is about 28 years old, and one of the best looking members of the foreign corps, has his apartments crowded with trunks, new relays of clothing arriving from London continually. His latest sensation is a yellow and black trap, in which he drives two coal black horses. The first day he drove this striking turnout he wore a suit of pale dove-color, yellow leggings, a soft hat of dove color and a sash of amber silk. Two "tigers," one in yellow and the other black, ride on the rear seat.

THE CAPITOL BUILDING, WASHINGTON.

Government Land in Hawaii.

A sale of government land took place in Olaa, near Hilo, recently. The price averaged about $50 an acre, and the total amount of the sale was $69,-258. The terms of sale were that the purchaser need not pay any of the purchase price for ten years, provided he pays the interest on the purchase price semi-annually in advance. Before a patent can be obtained the purchaser must comply with certain conditions of occupation and improvement. A number of the papers in the island treat the sale as simply a big speculation in land, holding that the terms of sale were such as to induce high prices, the purchasers being willing to pay interest on the purchase price for the chance of selling their rights at a profit as the demand for land increased.

Senators Chandler of New Hampshire and Spooner of Wisconsin have the reputation of being about the best two debaters in the senate. Mr. Chandler is more satiric and quick, but Mr. Spooner is more ready with impromptu argument.



HALL OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

A Strange Fish.

A fishing smack belonging to the fleet that plies its trade on the Bahama banks, was scurrying along before the strong west wind one day when the captain and crew, who were below at dinner, noticed that she suddenly righted and the rattling of the reefing points told that she was shaking in the wind.

"What are you luffing for?" the skipper shouted up the companionway. "Keep her on her course." But no reply. The reefing points continued to beat their tattoo and the big mainsail roared a loud protest.

The skipper sprang up the companionway to find the man at the wheel lying on the deck almost senseless. A few moments later he recovered sufficiently to explain that he had been knocked down by a violent blow, and a bruise upon his head was evidence that this was true.

But what could have struck the helmsman? There was absolutely nothing to explain it until suddenly the captain caught a movement in the scuppers and in a moment had in his hands a highly-colored fish, with long, wing-like fins, its head as hard as bony armament could make it.

It was the flying gurnard—a living arrow, a flyer without wings, that had dashed from its native element and gone soaring along, in its flight striking the helmsman so terrific a blow that he was rendered almost unconscious.

Such incidents are rare, yet the ordinary flying fish, especially the Pacific form, that is eighteen inches in length, is a formidable object when darting through the air, as is its habit when alarmed, says Humane Alliance. I have heard of one that flew aboard a steamer and dashed through a pane of heavy glass, striking the wall of the room with a force that would easily have knocked the occupant down. Not infrequently boatmen are struck with them, and the writer once had occasion to dodge these uncertain living projectiles.

How Zulu Women Sew.

The skill of the Zulu of South Africa in sewing fur is a household word in South Africa, and some of the other tribes compete with them. The needle employed is widely different from that used by the ordinary needlewoman. In the first place, it has no eye; in the second, it is like a skewer, pointed at one end and thick at the other.

The thread is not of cotton, but is made of the sinews of various animals, the best being made from the sinews in the neck of a giraffe. It is stiff, inelastic, with a great tendency to "kink" and tangle itself up with anything near it. Before being used it is steeped in hot water until it is quite soft, and is then beaten between two smooth stones, which causes it to separate into filaments, which can thus be obtained of any strength and thickness. Thus, the seamstress has a considerable amount of labor before she commences with the real work in hand.

Finally, she squats on the ground (for no native stands to work, or do anything else, who can possibly help it), and, taking her needle, bores two holes in the edges of the rug or garment on which she is working. The thread is then pushed through with the butt of the needle, drawn tight, and two more holes are made with a like result, the skewer progressing very slowly, but fast enough for a country where time is of no value whatever.

The skin upon which the seamstress is working is damped with water before she commences; and as the damp thread and hide dry out it brings the work very closely together.

Alfalfa Seed.

The quantity of seed to sow per acre is a question of considerable importance also. The majority of successful growers advise twenty to thirty pounds. If the seed were universally good, and the ground always well prepared, this would be grossly extravagant. A pound of alfalfa seed contains about 220,000 seeds. If ninety per cent of them germinate, twenty pounds per acre would give 3,780,000 plants, or eighty-eight per square foot. After nine-tenths of the young plants have perished from crowding or accidents we would still have an ample stand. From these facts one can readily find the reasons for difference of opinion among good farmers as to the quantity of seed to sow. As low as eight to ten pounds per acre have frequently been used with success. The quality of the seed is another very important factor. Good germinable seed should always be used. The percentage of germinability should be ascertained by a test before sowing. This is easily obtained as follows: Count out 100 seeds and place between two pieces of muslin. Invert a small dish in a larger vessel and pour water around it. Place the muslin with seeds on the inverted dish. Let one end of the muslin hang down into the water. Saturate muslin and seeds before putting them into the germinator and set the whole in a warm place. The sprouted seeds should be counted and discarded at intervals of two or three days until all have germinated that will do so. The number germinated will give the per cent of germinability. This ought not to be less than seventy-five per cent. The color of fresh alfalfa seed is a greenish orange-yellow. As it grows older it all slowly turns to a yellowish-brown color.

Maturity of Swine.

Prof. Thomas Shaw says: The maturing qualities of Berkshire swine are what may be termed of the plastic order. Maturity means completed development. Early maturity is completed development at an early age, and late maturity is completed development at any age later than the average. Plasticity in maturity means the capability of being matured at periods of development varying from an early age to one considerably later. When an animal possesses this quality in an eminent degree it can virtually be made ready for the market at any age, though not in all instances, with equal facility, for in all animals there is an age beyond which they may be more easily ripened than at an earlier period. The claim that Berkshires have plasticity of constitution in an eminent degree is abundantly sustained by common experience. The writer has prepared Berkshires for market at nearly all ages as occasion might demand, and has found no difficulty in making what may be termed a fine finish.

The ability to mature early is usually looked upon as the great consideration by the average grower of meat. This view has been fostered and disseminated, if indeed it has not been created by live stock writers who have but partially grasped the whole subject. Those men have contended that the more quickly an animal can be grown and matured, the more cheaply can it be produced. They have built their theory on the eternal truth, that under average conditions an animal will make daily gains which continually decrease as the birth period is receded from, notwithstanding a continuously increasing consumption of food. While that is true it is not true that earliest maturity is always the best kind of maturity. It is not true for the reason first, that earliest maturity is antagonistic to large size; second, it is prejudicial to the highest breeding and nursing qualities; and third, it compels marketing within a certain age. That it is antagonistic to large size is amply evidenced in the small maximum growth of the earliest maturing breeds, as, for instance, the small Yorkshires, the Suffolks, and the Essex. That it is prejudicial to the highest type of breeding and nursing qualities is evidenced in the small average of the litters of those breeds as compared with the litters of the large improved Yorkshire and Tamworth breeds, which are much later in maturing, and in the less marked ability of the breeds first named to sustain an undiminished milk-flow for a long period.

Dairy Notes.

We sometimes hear of co-operative creameries failing on account of divisions among the patrons and officers. One of the hardest things to learn is how to co-operate, but it is a lesson that can be learned easily if the people go at it in the right spirit. There are co-operative creameries that have been run with marked success for a score of years. Much depends on the make-up of the members of the official board. However, the lesson cannot be learned without actual experience. Fortunate is the locality that has a few cool-headed men to take the lead when the co-operative creamery is organized.

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Shall coloring matter be used in butter? That is a question that is answered either way, according to the standpoint from which it is answered. We must confess that if butter color were not used it would be easier to settle the oleomargarine question, for the law could simply prohibit coloring matter being used in butter and butter substitutes. But so far as we can discover there is no inclination among butter makers to give up the use of butter color, as they claim that it is necessary to use it to get uniformity in the make of butter. As long as the conditions are such as to make the use of butter colors necessary, the dairyman should see to it that only pure and safe colors are used. The poisonous ones should be sought out and avoided.

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Educate the creamery patron, for he is the one upon whom success largely depends. It is astonishing that the managers of creameries do not pay more attention to this matter. The owners of the stock in creameries should make an effort to rouse the patrons to a sense of the responsibilities devolving upon them. For it is impossible for the best butter-maker in the world to make good butter unless he have proper raw material upon which to work. Some have advocated school house meetings, and without doubt school house meetings are very effective in creating opinions in the right direction. We might go even further and suggest the holding of cottage meetings for the discussion of matters concerning the dairy.

A Problem of Plant Growth.

The growth of plants in air-tight spaces, even in hermetically sealed flasks, has been a puzzling problem. A cactus (Echinopsis multiplex) has been shown by Ludwig Rust, a German pharmacist, that had been growing in a sealed flask for seven years, and this has been presented the Berlin Botanical Garden in a thriving condition. It was at first explained that the plants derived carbonic acid from the algae that at times appeared on the sides of the flask. This explanation becoming insufficient, it has been decided that the necessary oxygen must be furnished by the enclosed air, and that the carbonic acid, required in excess in time, is supplied by putrefaction in the soil in quantity sufficient to sustain the life of the plant. To determine the source of the necessary water has been most difficult, the final conclusion being that it is furnished by the decay of cellulose and animal matter in the soil.